

Publishing in Africa from Independence to the Present Day

Walter Bgoya is Managing Director and Founder of Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, Tanzania.

Indigenous publishing is integral to national identity and development: cultural, social, and economic. Such publishing reflects a people's history and experience, belief systems, and their concomitant expressions through language, writing, and art. In turn, a people's interaction with other cultures is informed by their published work. Publishing preserves, enhances, and develops a society's culture and its interaction with others. In Africa, indigenous publishers continue to seek autonomy to pursue these aims: free from the constraints of the colonial past, the strictures of economic structural adjustment policies, the continuing dominance of multinational publishers (particularly in textbooks), regressive language policies, and lack of recognition by African governments of the economic and cultural importance of publishing. African publishers seek to work collectively, to harness the digital age, and to take their place in the international marketplace on equal terms, Africa's own voice.

Indigenous, or autonomous, publishing is integral to national identity and development: cultural, social, and economic. Such publishing reflects a people's history and experience, belief systems, and their concomitant expressions through language, writing, and art. In turn, a people's interaction with other cultures is informed by this written identity. Publishing—particularly scholarly works, literary publishing, and books for children—preserves, enhances, and develops one society's culture and its interaction with others. In the words of the Malawian historian Paul Tiyambe Zeleza:

Mary Jay is a

former
Director and
CEO of African
Books
Collective

Books constitute crucial repositories of social memories and imaginations, containing the accumulated cultural capacity of society, of its accomplishments, agonies, and aspirations. Books, therefore, are not and cannot be a luxury, a dispensable dessert on the menu of development, nationhood, or human progress. They are an essential component of these processes—indeed, their intellectual salt, spice, and starch. (qtd. in Gibbs and Mapanje 5)

Indigenous and independent publishing in Africa, or elsewhere, is a key component of the (in)visibility of a culture.

This article examines the state of play of independent publishing in sub-Saharan Africa. Given the paucity of statistical records, we are reliant partly on our monitoring of individual publishers' experience over many years. South Africa's publishing industry has a different development history and, thus, our general comments do not necessarily always apply there. Our joint experience emanates from our involvement in African publishing.

The written word in Africa has roots in the early civilizations of the Nile Valley and western and coastal eastern Africa. During the middle ages, religious centers spread the written word; monasteries in Christian Ethiopia produced illuminated scripts in Ge'ez. In the Western Sudan, Jenne, and Timbuktu, important trading posts and Islamic study centers housed the oldest libraries and universities in sub-Saharan Africa; and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, royal scripts in Arabic were produced on the Swahili East Coast and in Madagascar (Bor- tolot). Printed books became widespread in Africa with the arrival of European missionaries, primarily for purposes of religious conversion, heralding the advent of colonialism. By 1884, foreign occupation was limited mainly to the coastline, the Berlin Conference of 1884–85 heralded “the scramble” for Africa, and by 1914, Africa was under European occupation with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia (Ajayi and Crowder 55–63). In 1960, as independence began to dawn across the continent, only 9% of the African population was literate (Gibbs and Mapanje 3–14). With the growth of literacy after independence, publishing developed; predominantly educational publishing by foreign-owned companies keen to develop an untapped market. Books were not originated within Africa, but from publishing decisions made in the north: ideas, writers, and decisions were not African. Even where they were originated by local branches of foreign companies publishing in European languages, it was the parent companies overseas and not the local branches that had the final decisions on their publication.

Henry Chakava, the distinguished Kenyan publisher, has noted that, in the post-independence period in Kenya, Longman and Oxford University Press had offices in Nairobi, but “neither company published locally; rather their function was to collect good manuscripts and forward them to London for vetting and publishing” (6). The East African Literature Bureau developed textbooks that were placed for publication with the foreign publishers, rather than supporting the development of an indigenous publishing industry: “the Bureau bore all the publishing risks for these commercial publishers. . . . They did not have to spend their money on marketing research, or sales promotion. . . . The risks were borne by the Bureau which could only afford to do this at the expense of the East African tax-payer” (Chege 130–31). By about 1968, close to eighty British publishers had some form of presence in Kenya (Chakava 10).

Heinemann's African Writers Series titles were published under license from London to the subsidiary Heinemann Kenya, although the subsidiary also published a number of titles independently. The content of education was not primarily drawn from African

culture. In so far as, for example, geometry was taught, it was based on observations of patterns, designs, and models from Western material culture and not from similar African objects, such as the basket weavers of Mozambique, mats on the eastern coast, and intricate designs and decorative motifs in the arts of other areas (Gerdes). Philip Altbach, U.S. scholar on educational leadership and higher education, comments on this need for indigenous production knowledge:

Publishing, because it is absolutely essential to the cultural, scientific, and educational life of nations, has an importance beyond its limited economic role. While it may be appropriate to import textiles or even computers, the production of books that directly reflect the culture, history of a nation or people is something that cannot be left to others, . . . It is a vital part of culture and deserves special consideration. (Altbach and Teffera 14)

POST-INDEPENDENCE PUBLISHING

After the early dawn of independence, particularly in the 1970s and early 1980s, parastatal and independent indigenous publishing houses were established. However, African governments, preoccupied mostly with economic development, gave little or no support to modern cultural industries, interpreting culture primarily as folklore and dancing to entertain government and political party leaders or visiting dignitaries. Legislation for development of authors and publishers' rights was inadequate, with weak copyright law and enforcement. Government policies were regressive, for example, imposing duties and taxes on book manufacturing materials—paper primarily, but also other consumables for printing machinery, such as spare parts, inks, dyes, chemicals, films, and plates. In addition, there were insufficient training centers for the staff needed in the publishing and printing industries. Rather, governments favored local publishing by parastatal companies, which they considered to be the way forward for an African publishing industry to counter the dominance of foreign-owned companies.

Parastatals, independents, and university presses suffered from a lack of funding and changes in international funding policies during the 1980s and 1990s. Both the parastatals and the independents were hard hit by the IMF/World Bank structural adjustment policies in the 1980s, compounding the inherent problems of a weak sector. Undercapitalization; inaccessible financing, with up to 40% interest on bank loans and overdrafts; lack of purchasing power by even more impoverished populations than before; low literacy, particularly in the European languages in which publishing was concentrated; weak distribution systems; and the collapse of public libraries, where they existed, all led to the demise of publishing by parastatals and independents. University presses, too, were hit by the lack of funding. For example, soon after ABC started trading in 1990, every Nigerian university press supplied titles for distribution; however, by the end of the decade, only a very few occasionally supplied a new one. The presses cited that insufficient funds were allocated by university bursaries to fund the development and publication of books. However foreign publishing houses, particularly British, continued to supply books to tertiary-level institutions and universities and, therefore, still made some money, despite the crisis. In some cases, for example in Tanzania, multinational companies pulled out when the economic crisis struck in the 1980s, only to return promptly when the World Bank allocated \$60 million for educational supplies (Mcharazo 245).

Survival was made difficult for both parastatals and the fledgling independents in the private sector. The combination of the decline of GDP in Africa, generally, and aid

policies favoring the donation of foreign books resulted in a number of closures. Tanzania Publishing House, the state publishing house, had declined from a vibrant publisher with a distinguished list to the near inability to publish at all, as the government did not or could not pay the printing bills.

The goals of the aid policies were to get books into schools, irrespective of their provenance, the cultural relevance of the materials, or the “development” effects under so-called international competitive bidding. These policies interacted with the domination of foreign publishing houses to produce an environment in which it was difficult, in some instances impossible, to survive.

THE 1990S

Development aid to Africa in the 1990s, for the first time, incorporated local publishing as the key to sustainable book provision and development. Following the disastrous economic collapses emanating from structural adjustment policies and their impact on education, it was clear, at least to Nordic donors, that only by developing local publishing sector industries, *ceteris paribus*, would sustainability of book provision to schools be guaranteed. Three substantial initiatives received funding at a continental level: African Books Collective, Bellagio Publishing Network, and the African Publishers Network. The Council for Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) continued to receive support indirectly for its publishing program, having been established in 1973, and the Zimbabwe International Book Fair and the Southern African Book Education Trust also received funding during the period, but are no longer major players.

African Books Collective (ABC)

A group of seventeen active publishers in sub-Saharan Africa met in London in 1985 to brainstorm about the hurdles they faced and how they could cooperate together to address them. The preliminary research and meeting was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and built on a key conference organized by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in 1984: “The Development of Autonomous Publishing in Africa” (Another Development and the World Crisis). At this conference in Arusha, Tanzania, participants had committed to addressing international marketing and distribution problems collectively. In the mid-eighties, African publishers were faced with two substantial problems. On the one hand, they still had foreign exchange constraints, making overseas sales difficult if not impossible, a situation compounded by expensive and inefficient postal services. On the other, they were unable individually to invest in the marketing systems necessary to access northern markets.

They decided, therefore, to establish ABC in the UK, for their largely English language lists, to market and distribute their titles worldwide in the markets of the north, primarily Europe and the U.S., but also including all non-African countries. At that time, in the pre-digital marketing age, Europe and the U.S. were the most accessible markets. Thus, in a similar manner to leading international publishers, they established their own organization in the center of the markets they were seeking to penetrate. It took a further five years for sufficient capital to be raised to start operations. That capital for start-up came from two sources: three donors, Sida, Ford Foundation, and the

Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), and a considerable investment by the publishers of £1,000 each in hard currency, no mean feat at that time. The resulting company was not capitalized and the original founding group continue to own and govern the organization.

It is depressing to note now that, given the vicissitudes suffered since that time, only a minority of the original publishers are still actively publishing. However, it is open to any independent publisher to join, in the sense that if they have suitable titles for joint promotion—scholarly and literary primarily, emanating from the African perspective—their titles are marketed and distributed worldwide. Legal contract between the publisher and ABC governs the relationship: for titles that ABC agrees to market and distribute, as being suitable within the ethos of ABC, the publisher grants exclusive distribution rights for the title outside Africa. Thereafter, the title enjoys the full range of digital and conventional marketing. 1 Conventional means of marketing continue through listings on Nielsen Bookscan and international bibliographic databases, as well as in printed catalogues, exhibits, and individual mailings.

The advent of the Internet has hugely expanded this range of marketing possibilities and has enhanced upload systems. New titles are now posted directly on the ABC website, as well as Nielsen and all the major online databases, and are emailed to international wholesalers. The catalogue is available online and new works can be ordered directly through the ABC website. Information is also posted to subject-specific discussion groups and new titles are emailed monthly to a subscriber list of over 2,000. By offering access to international distribution for some 2,000 titles from 136 indigenous publishers, ABC has assisted, although not overcome, the issue of attracting African authors to publish with African publishers.

It has been posited that there is no longer a reason to complain, as African publishers now have international distribution through ABC and there is a wealth of African scholarship and writing being marketed and distributed (see, for example, Zell). “Wealth” in this sense means the content of books, not the quantity. By far, the greatest part of publishing in Africa is of textbooks and this market is still largely dominated by multinational publishers. Thus, relative to the total output of all publishing on the continent, the number of non-textbook titles produced by indigenous publishers is small. A survey in 2000 by the Association for Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and the African Publishers Network (APNET) estimated that up to 95% of books published in Africa were educational, as compared to the broad ratio in the north of 60:40 textbooks to non-textbooks.²

That survey indicated that the African continent consumes in excess of 12% of all books produced in the world, but contributes less than 3%. Similarly, the latest subject index of African Books in Print in 2006 lists 3,500 African literature titles in print in French and English; this publishing output from a continent estimated in 2009 to have a total population over one billion, according to the UN Population Fund. This equates to a ratio of roughly 1:285,714 for literature books. In 2011, the U.S., with a population of 311,591,917, published 347,178 titles in all genres, of which 91,827 were literature, which is a ratio of 1:3,393 (“New Book Titles and Editions: 2002–2011”). There is no evidence that has changed.

The traditional model of publishing industries in the developed world is that the profits made from textbook publishing for schools and tertiary institutions are partly invested in publishing for the wider market, particularly scholarly titles and literary and children’s books for the general consumer market. Indeed, much of the attraction of

publishing lies in the cultural and intellectual endeavor of the importance of the book. But the multinationals that take the lion's share of the textbook market in Africa invest little, if any, of those profits within the country in which they are made; and the non-textbook sector is insufficiently developed by indigenous publishers, partly because of their long effective exclusion from the textbook market.

Two cases illustrate particular instances of exclusion of indigenous publishers. In 2010, Macmillan Limited, a UK company, was the subject of a World Bank investigation and finding that declared the company ineligible for Bank-financed contracts for a period of six years, following an admission of receiving bribes for orders for educational books in South Sudan (World Bank, "World Bank Group Debars Macmillan"). Subsequently, the UK Serious Fraud Office (SFO) fined Macmillan £11.2m in 2011 (SFO, "Action on Macmillan"). In a second World Bank investigation, Oxford University Press East Africa and OUP Tanzania, two wholly owned Oxford University Press (OUP) subsidiaries, were debarred for three years from World Bank-funded orders. This followed a finding of improper payments made to government officials (World Bank, "World Bank Sanctions Oxford University Press"). Subsequently, the UK Serious Fraud Office fined OUP £1.9m. OUP compliance procedures will be independently monitored for report to the SFO within twelve months, with separate reporting to the World Bank (SFO, "Oxford Publishing Ltd to Pay"). The African companies in the OUP case are subsidiaries, thus their profits benefit the parent company rather than the local economy.

Added to this, and given the hard economic climate over recent years, many indigenous publishers have concentrated exclusively on trying to access the textbook market, which is more lucrative than non-textbooks, and are unable or unwilling to take the commercial risks of non-textbook publishing. There are no updated figures, but despite dispute, the most recent UNESCO estimates show that Africa's share in the world trade of all cultural goods, including books, is less than 1%; with African books representing less than a third of one percent of global cultural trade. Africa, with 15% of the world's population, produces less than 2% of the world's books.³ Of the three other notable publishing initiatives that received funding during the 1990s, only CODESRIA remains fully active.

Other Donor Recipients in the 1990s and Beyond

The Bellagio Publishing Network (BPN) was established soon after ABC, following a major conference in 1991 at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center in Bellagio, Italy. It brought together key practitioners from Africa, Europe, the U.S., and Asia and gave rise to a state-of-the-art publication (Altbach). Four African publishers, and founders of ABC, attended: Walter Bgoya (Tanzania), Henry Chakava (Kenya), Mothobi Mutloase (South Africa), and the late Victor Nwankwo (Nigeria). From that conference, BPN was created, which brought practitioners together with European and U.S. donors newly concerned with support for African publishing. A major outcome was wider donor support for ABC and the establishment of APNET. The Bellagio Publishing Network ceased activity effectively in 2002 after the establishment of APNET, to which donor funding had diverted.

APNET was established by donors as a publishers' association for Africa as a whole, which enjoyed positive relationships with relevant international donors and NGOs. They published studies on the publishing and book trades in Africa and a members' newsletter, negotiated positive terms with the World Bank on education and textbook projects, and ran highly prized publishing training programs. Unfortunately, APNET has effectively been dormant over recent years, with two factors, in particular, contributing

to the demise of its operations. First, its remit encompassed too wide a brief. Its members are national publishers associations and the network covered the entire continent. While donors saw the advantage of “Africa,” speaking as a whole, the potentially constituent fifty-two countries are markedly different, characterized by varied language policies; diverging publishing structures in the ex-colonial anglophone, francophone, lusophone, and Maghreb countries; varying publishing industries and national policies (or lack of thereof); and different states of development and economic policies. The second problem facing APNET was that the national publishers associations were unable to fund its activities, it had no independent commercial income and, thus, remained donor dependent, operating as an NGO. This created a dichotomy of needing to be an independent voice for a commercial industry, while functioning within the framework of an NGO. Consequently, APNET had no recourse when donor funding ceased. It remains in being, today, with the hopes of future reactivation.

CODESRIA (the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) is the pan-African research organization established in 1973 in Senegal to promote, facilitate, and disseminate research within the social sciences in Africa and to create a community in which this can take place. CODESRIA was also one of the founder publishers of ABC. It is worth noting here, as an organization that continues to enjoy donor support, that they have a prestigious publishing program attracting many of Africa’s top scholars, such as Samir Amin, Mahmood Mamdani, Amina Mama, Thandika Mkandawire, and Paul Zeleza. This is a significant accomplishment given their importance in publishing within Africa, despite their primary focus on research and its dissemination. As well as promoting interdisciplinary social research deriving from and relevant to the experience of the African continent and its peoples, CODESRIA has developed:

A programme of student grants and fellowships, designed to promote the cultivation of talent and a thirst for competitive and high-quality scholarship (through methodology workshops, seminars, essay and dissertation competitions) among the young. The council also strived to offer an outlet for the formulation and expression of African perspectives and scholarship and, in so doing, enabling a contribution to ongoing debates on the continent and the world through a scholarly publications programme. (Olukoshi and Nyamnjoh 57)

The specific objectives of CODESRIA’s publishing program are

- 1) Contributing to the development of a culture of scholarly publishing in Africa, and through this contribution, helping to strengthen the institutional basis of scholarly publishing and knowledge production.
- 2) Promoting excellence in publishing as well as the development of an African community of Social Science and Humanities scholars who cross-reference one another in active dialogue, debate, and discussion on the manner in which scholarship is to understand, interpret, and ultimately contribute towards designed social change in Africa.
- 3) Encouraging knowledge production and dissemination by female scholars and younger academics both generally and, more especially, through books and special issues of journals that focus on themes targeting women and youth for contributions and readership.

4) Encouraging the development of a reading and writing culture among African scholars, including support to younger scholars for the development of skills for academic publishing. (Ibid.)

International donors support various initiatives in higher education; and while this support is not for publishing as such, CODESRIA publishing benefits from the output of its own research. This is an example of indirect imaginative support to Africa's own publishing output.

The Zimbabwe International Book Fair (ZIBF) was founded during the 1990s with donor support and great backing, in terms of attendance and input, from the publishing industries within and outside Africa. It established itself as the crucial crossroads of all the players in the industry; indeed it became essential for information and networking reasons to be present. It was a genuine Africa crossroads venue and much business was done there in the sense of copublishing, again with African or outside partners. Additionally, there was an invaluable annual Indaba (a council or meeting of people) examining all the issues pertinent to African publishing. For reasons that may be disputed, it declined during the early 2000s and, although it remains in being, it is a much lamented loss to African publishers.

The Southern Africa Book Development Education Trust (SABDET), a UK trust, was a precursor, in one sense, to ZIBF, being primarily formed to promote it. It provided the invaluable promotional work and organized programs around ZIBF and was wholly donor funded. When ZIBF was fully launched, and with the demise in the early 2000s of donor funding for programs in support of African publishing, SABDET wound up closing. It was a commendable example of an organization not seeking to perpetuate itself per se, but recognizing that its work had been done.

BEYOND THE 1990s

Donor programs during the 1990s recognized the cultural importance of independent African publishing: ABC, BPN, and APNET enjoyed donor support from a variety of organizations over different periods, whether for specific projects or core funding. The main donors supporting these African publishing initiatives were Sida, Norad, Danida (previously Danish International Development

Assistance, now a department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Hivos (the Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation in the Netherlands), the Ford Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. Other individual grants were made to individual organizations from time to time: for example, ABC received grants from the Canadian International Development Agency (CODE), UNESCO, and the Commonwealth Foundation and APNET currently receives grants from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian KOPINOR. However, only ABC has actively survived, being a commercial operation with a cultural mission, and has successfully been independent of donor funding since 2007. There were other direct and indirect players before 2000, none of which remain active in any real sense.

Few of the funded initiatives survived, as self-sufficiency had not been reached when agencies changed their strategies to focus on supporting the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which notably do not include culture. Many donors stopped funding publishing to concentrate on these goals, which include end poverty and hunger, universal education,

gender equality, child health, maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability, and global partnership.

The goals are implemented through government-to-government poverty strategy agreements. There is no specific goal identifying economic self-sustainability, which by implication means that the MDGs are largely, if not wholly, donor driven. Notwithstanding, individual countries may seek to interpret the goals within the context of economic self-sustainability, or indeed it may be included in their agreements, but it is not stated in the goals. And yet surely, all of the goals ought to be predicated on Africa achieving funding capability from its own economic performance.

Publishing is an economic activity, albeit one with cultural importance. African indigenous scholarly publishers contribute to the UN's goals through publications that are the results of scholarly research, which speaks directly to the second goal of universal education. For example, ABC sought to investigate its contribution to poverty reduction in 2006 as a campaign partner of Make Poverty History. That report (internal since it contains commercially confidential information) was shared with donors. The results illustrated that the majority of ABC publishers were SMEs (small to medium-sized enterprises), qualifying under the UN, World Bank, and European Union definition.

Two specific case studies were made for Tanzania and Ghana.

The Tanzanian per capita average annual income is about \$270, which is \$95/year below the poverty line of \$1/day (African Development Foundation). Over 50% of the estimated 34 million Tanzanians live below the poverty line. From 2004 to June 2006, ABC remitted £34,364 to Tanzania, or the equivalent of \$58,420, representing \$23,368 per annum. Over the last two-and-a-half year period, ABC remittances—expressed in terms of income from trade and its contribution to poverty reduction—represented 246 people lifted and maintained above the poverty line, on average. Alternatively, the income could be expressed as an average income just above the poverty line for 64 people.

The case study for Ghana illustrated that the per capita average income is \$380 (African Development Foundation). Nearly 40% of the population of 21 million live below the poverty line. From 2004 to June 2006, ABC had remitted £44,960 to Ghana, or the equivalent of \$83,141, representing \$33,256 per annum. Thus, on average, over the last two-and-a-half years, ABC remittances, expressed in terms of income from trade and its contribution to poverty reduction, represented an average income just above the poverty line for 91 people.

The results showed that, irrespective of the direct publishing benefit, there were benefits for ancillary services such as printers, booksellers, libraries, freelance editors, book designers, typesetters, illustrators, and paper suppliers. The reality is that these are the professionals that are dependent on publishers, if the initial point is taken that independence, both economically and culturally, should be respected. There is no longer a window for aid to the publishing industry as such, insofar as its importance and relevance to the MDGs, which has not been recognized.

African books and publishing development, being integral to broader development as such, merit support and assistance in terms of appropriate policies by African governments and

overseas partners. In practice, overseas support has depressingly become “charitable” work of support for reading in Africa. This has added to the (in)visibility of Africa’s own scholarly and literary output on the continent. It is premised that donating British or American books to libraries and educational institutions solves the problem of books and reading. On the contrary, such policies are an inescapable part of the problem because they fail to respect fair practices in relation to indigenous African publishers and publishing.

In an attempt to counter this issue, ABC organized the Intra-African Book Support Scheme (IABSS), which was supported by various donors, particularly SAREC. The IABSS operated from 1991 to 2004, later in cooperation with Book Aid International. The demise of the only book donation program of African-published books to Africa is much regretted by librarians, publishers, and the school/community libraries, who were able to select titles they wanted from within Africa. By its end, on average, some 12,000 literary and children’s titles and 7,000 scholarly titles were donated each year, circulating books around Africa, all as requested by the recipients, to the benefit of the recipients and the publishers.

AUTHORS

As publishing is a partnership between publisher and author, the author’s choice of publisher had, and continues to have, an impact on independent publishing in Africa. Soon after the start of independent publishing, there were severe foreign exchange constraints in Africa. Additionally, because education had been colonial and all things of value were thought to emanate from the metropolitan centers in the north, there were psychological and economic reasons for authors to prefer a European publisher. Indeed that has persisted: the lack of citations of articles in African published journals, the lack of confidence in the now global reach of the African publisher, and the importance of publication with a prestigious European or American publisher for tenure in a foreign university all feed the argument for publishing outside Africa (Zezeza).

Although the self-interest of the author to have their work widely read is understandable, there remains this unjustifiable presumption in favor of a non- African publisher. Copublication is one route: but while northern publishers are always keen to find markets in Africa for their books, they are rarely receptive to southern proposals for northern copublication. There are instances too of African authors being nurtured by African publishers, who then win prizes or find a copublisher and subsequently publish with them, without reciprocation for the publisher that gave them their start. This enduring issue echoes the debates in Africa in the 1980s: do authors have a primary duty to national development or to their art? One might say to both. A good example is provided by one particular African literary writer in the diaspora who is highly successful: she writes in English and lives primarily in the U.S. and wants principally to be published in the U.S. and UK, but insists that her contracts give free copublication rights to her country of origin.⁵ It is not giving original rights to an African publisher with an overseas copublication, but it is a support to the African publishing industry nonetheless.

LANGUAGE

Language of publishing and instruction remains a key issue in postcolonial Africa. Freedom from poverty, ignorance, and disease were expected to follow from education. All African countries at independence invested heavily in education and gains in other areas of development were registered in the first 10–20 years in part due to improvements in this arena. Considerable investment was made in the social sector, especially in education, to counter Africa's colonial heritage of being seen as the most educationally backward region in the world. The result of these social investments was an impressive improvement in levels of education and literacy. Primary-school enrollments increased from 41% to 68% of the eligible population from 1965 to the mid-1980s. A cadre of professionals was produced to administer the postcolonial states (Mkandawire and Soludo 16). And more generally,

. . . despite the many distortions of import substitution, up until the second "oil" crisis, many African colonies had performed relatively well. Indeed the performance of some of the countries was of "miraculous" proportions (for instance, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Malawi, and Tanzania had rates of growth of more than 6 percent for over a decade, based largely on agricultural and industrial expansion). One interesting feature is that much of this growth was sustained largely by domestic savings which increased from around 15 percent in 1960 to 25 percent in 1980. (Ibid. 303)

The Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey in 2010 found that "72% of women and 82% of men were literate" while "literacy rates in rural areas (66% for women and 77% for men) were much lower than in urban areas (87% for women and 94% for men)" (United Republic of Tanzania, MKUKUTA 41–52). Net enrollment in primary schools rose from 66% in 2001 to 97% in 2008, but has steadily declined to 94% in 2011. This data is evidence of a dramatic rise in enrolment rates for primary schooling in Tanzania, which contrasts sharply with the net enrolment ratio in secondary schools, which only increased from 6% in 2002 to 35% in 2011 (Ibid. 49).

Looking back over fifty years of independence, people's desire for education has always been overwhelming and initially the response of all African states was positive. However, there appears to have been no or only little consideration given to the content of that education. As such, the values underpinning colonial-type education, the ways it was delivered, and the relevance of its content to the challenges of nation building were not questioned. In countries like Tanzania, where the leadership was committed to making education a right of all citizens, that right was limited only to primary education. Secondary education was considered a privilege and, thus, allocated minimal resources, with ominous implications for future middle- and high-level employment requirements in the public and private sectors. That future has arrived and yet the policy on the language of instruction still has not changed, despite the negative effects that are evident everywhere.

Denial of the right to education, as well as a violation of the right to receive and impart information, are the outcomes of the policy of using foreign languages as the mediums of instruction in African schools. Language of instruction in African education remains contentious. More than forty years have passed since the first research findings in Tanzania clearly established the disadvantages of secondary school education in a language in which neither students nor teachers have sufficient command (see Mlama and Matteredu). The Ministry of Education in 2011 remains, however, determined to maintain the policy of English as the medium of instruction, with no option for teaching in Swahili. While English-medium pre-primary to secondary private schools

are allowed to operate, Swahili-medium secondary schools are banned. To illustrate the point, in 2002, Mkuki na Nyota Publishers submitted the first of four bilingual Swahili/English textbooks, covering the equivalent of the O-level chemistry syllabus, to the Educational Materials Approval Committee of the Ministry of Education for evaluation. Although the material in both languages adequately covered the chemistry syllabus for Form 1, it was rejected solely because it was bilingual. The publisher was informed that approval would be given if the Swahili pages were removed (Kemia)!

It is interesting here to note a comparison with three smaller European bilingual countries: Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Although Sweden, Norway, and Denmark have a combined population that is less than half that of Tanzania, which is approaching 43 million, education from the cradle to the grave is in Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish. They learn English (as an international language of communication) as a second language, such that most Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes, certainly in the professional classes, speak perfect English. And yet, though Swahili is spoken throughout Tanzania and in much of eastern and parts of southern Africa, these regions of the continent do not follow this policy and are, thus, denied their cultural heritage. The mindset is that English, not Swahili, can best deliver education and, based on the example of the rejection of the bilingual chemistry book, it is tantamount to outlawing the language.

While the world scientific community, certainly the IT giants, Microsoft, Google, and others, are busy developing Swahili programs, Tanzania—where leading Swahili research institutions have developed dictionaries and lexicons in many fields, including science and technology—is busy outlawing the use of Swahili in schools. This appalling lack of respect for national culture, which insists that education can only be in the colonial language, has resulted in poor education and a lamentable knowledge of English. Despite all scholarly research and evidence to the contrary, this is the one area where “choice” is not allowed and, indeed, is positively illegal.

The 1997 Tanzania Cultural Policy states clearly that a program using Swahili as the medium of instruction at all levels of education shall be “designed and implemented” (United Republic of Tanzania, “Cultural Policy”). Nonetheless, current government policies for education counteract this objective, pursuing those that are inimical to requiring Swahili to be the language of instruction. Pressure is exerted on parents to enroll their children in English-medium schools—because they are better resourced than public schools. For example, teachers in English schools are better trained and paid and instruction in science, art, and IT and programming in other essential areas, such as sports, are superior. The outcome of this, of course, is better-educated pupils, the results of teaching and facilities, not the language of instruction. It goes without saying that education under these conditions in Swahili would also produce better-educated pupils. The problem lies in the fact that the wrong message is taken from this set of circumstances, all that is seen is that there is something inherent in the English language that leads to educational improvements (Brock-Utne and Desai; Brock-Utne and Hopson). It is generally understood that political leaders and well-to-do parents in Tanzania do not send their children to public schools, preferring to send them to exclusive boarding schools in foreign countries!

PUBLISHING IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES

Discrimination against African languages in education has very negative consequences on publishing, readership, and on

the development of literature in general. Scholarship in African languages cannot develop when African languages are not used in higher learning and research institutions.

As a result, many graduates are unable to write academic prose in their first language. This affects recruitment into the publishing industry, particularly in editorial departments. Without a strong command of one's own language, or the language in which one has to work, as in Tanzania, one cannot be productive in an industry that requires proficiency and extensive knowledge of the subject matter of texts to be edited and organized into books. Good editors contribute crucially to authors' works, so much so that it is not unusual for authors to have more loyalty to their editors than to their publishing houses, often moving with their editors to new ones. Without good editors, publishing houses are unlikely to publish good books.

Similar issues apply to readership, on which publishing depends. The reality is that most students in secondary schools in Tanzania cannot read books that are written in more than rudimentary English and the situation is not very different at the university level. Because Kiswahili has been limited to primary schools, serious literature that is above that level does not have a market and will not develop. The implications here are numerous and onerous. A whole range of professions associated with literature and research, such as translation and interpretation in international organizations (e.g., UN, AU, UNESCO, etc.), are effectively closed off to Tanzanians. Even with Kiswahili, Tanzanians fare worse than other less able speakers for positions as language experts on the international market. This is because others tend to have the advantage of a more well-rounded education, thanks to more coherent educational language policies in their countries, even if they are not the most enlightened as far as the promotion of African languages in education is concerned.

The impact of these language policies on publishing is that indigenous African publishers are largely active only in primary level publishing. They are barely visible in tertiary publishing and certainly not in Scientific, Technical, and Medical (STM) publishing. If, for example, 23% of Tanzanians are illiterate and educational standards are low because the language of instruction in secondary schools, English, limits comprehension, the result must logically restrict the market for books. The language and literacy issues compound problems caused by the separate issues of poverty and a lack of purchasing power.

Whether the mindset that dismisses African languages as languages of instruction for a modern education is or is not a legacy of colonialism is not important. What is important, given the fifty odd years of independence and the crisis of African education, is that language policy remains central to education and critical thinking and to the autonomous all-around development of culture, in which publishing plays an important part. It is not justifiable to assert that there are no solutions in Africa: indeed there are in detailed research and analysis, which is available to policy makers who have, as yet, not been willing to take the issue seriously.

CONCLUSION: LOOKING FORWARD

The digital age is empowering African publishers. However, a caveat must be entered about infrastructure: the cost of an Internet connection, the reliability of electricity, as well as the affordability of computers and software for populations that are living in grinding poverty and staggering levels of unemployment necessarily slows its affects. The widespread use and relative expense of mobile phones is well known, but that

technology is limited in terms of the receipt of manuscripts, editing, etc. Tablets, such as the iPad, may assist, but are available only to a small elite portion of the population.

ABC is committed to the use of new technologies and its publishers are empowered by the advent of print-on-demand, which has made a crucial contribution to self-sustainability. In this digital age, publishers send files by email for upload to ABC digital printers and the opportunities for digital Internet marketing, utilizing all means available, will only continue to grow. ABC prints, to customer order, in the U.S. for North American customers, in Australia for Australia and New Zealand, and in the UK for Europe and the rest of the world. The savings on shipping books from Africa, customs and import clearance charges, and warehousing have been material. At the same time, production values have been brought in line with international standards, eliminating returns because of poor production. These cost savings have been the essential component in achieving self-sustainability and in the publishers gaining full autonomy over their international marketing and distribution.

While ABC does not have the promotional and marketing budgets of the major European and U.S. publishers, they do have similar access to digital outlets. Similarly, titles are made available as e-books, widening the reach into university libraries in particular. Sales of e-books, as such, have only started relatively recently, so there is insufficient data as yet to identify patterns of purchase. However, sales of e-content to university libraries are growing and are mainly for single, multiple, or perpetual use. As sales are through international aggregators to libraries, it is not possible to estimate the actual numbers of people who access the content, but it is clear that sales of e-content represent some 5% of all annual sales and are increasing, without any evidence that it has resulted in a loss of sales of the print editions.

Africa is an enormous continent and the publishing situation varies within it from country to country. There are particular local factors that influence the progress, or lack thereof, of indigenous African publishing companies. There are, too, negative legacies of the colonial period, which nonetheless can be overcome by good policies by African governments and with international agency policies that prioritize African economic self-sufficiency, whereby nations can meet the challenges of development with their own resources. Indigenous publishing began to make significant advances after independence, but structural adjustment policies severely impacted on that progress. Direct donor aid to publishing filled gaps from the 1990s for more than ten years, but it is no longer available. Education and language policies, weak infrastructure, and lack of purchasing power continue to present hurdles to African publishers, with textbook and language policies creating probably the most significant brake to progress. They want to look to the future, but cannot escape the past without fair and equitable policy environments, notwithstanding continuing efforts to circumvent the hurdles. Two major hurdles that Africa cannot be expected to correct alone are the need for fair, transparent, and honest textbook tendering and for book donation programs that include African-published books, rather than those exclusively produced abroad.

Self-sufficiency and independence is the preferred way forward. Innovative African publishers are working collectively to access the northern markets and to utilize the digital age through print-on-demand, e-books, and Internet and digital marketing. At the same time, indigenous scholarship and culture published in Africa gives the

continent its own international voice in intellectual discourses about African issues.

Beyond increasing a publisher's profile, overseas sales contribute to their ability to reinvest in publishing programs. Limited, but insufficient, progress has been made in, thus, attracting African authors to publish with African publishers. Much of the welcome celebration of African literary writers in the north emanates from diaspora publishing and doesn't directly benefit African economies.

There are policy frameworks on which African publishers continue to seek progress, including equitable textbook tendering, removing taxes and duties on printing materials so as to lower printing costs, and promoting development of viable and internationally competitive printing. Without appropriate frameworks, they cannot become dominant and economically viable publishers in their own countries. African publishers and authors produced a "New Deal" statement back in 1999, which still holds today, wherein they set out a charter to work collaboratively to strengthen publishing and authorship from their own endeavors and resources (Gibbs and Mapanje 131-34). Little progress has been made, largely impacted by the continuing weakness of the publishing industry and attractions for authors to publish with companies in the north.

The African Union (AU) undertook in-depth research on curriculum, literacy, and book sector development, as part of an initial conference on rebuilding education in Africa, ultimately producing a concept paper in 1999. It specifically considered the future of the African publishing industry, including support for publishing in African languages and training and capacity building for African publishers ("First Pan-African Conference"). A major outcome of this conference was expected to be a continental book policy framework. There is little evidence that such a policy has translated into national book and publishing policies. AU officials recommended to AU Ministers of Education in April 2012 that they should "Promote the continental book policy framework for use in developing national book policies" ("Pan-African Conference on Teacher Development").

In conclusion, publishing is an economic activity, capable of contributing to a country's wealth. It is not only a reflection of cultural identity and pride, but is key to education. It remains imperative that Africa be able to achieve true economic and cultural independence with contributions from its own publishing industry.

NOTES

1. See the frequently asked questions section of the African Books Collective website: africanbookscollective.com/faq.
2. Brian Warafarowa, then Chairman of APNET, at the International Booksellers Federation General Assembly and Conference, South Africa, 2007.
3. See UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Sector of Culture.
4. Businesses must be independent, small enterprises of less than 50 employees and turnover less than €20 million, or \$12.7 million (Canadian). Medium-sized enterprises must have 50-250 employees and turnover of less than €50 million, or \$63.5 million (Canadian).
5. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, speaking in October 2005 in London at African Visions: A Festival of African Literature, Culture, and Politics, which was organized by the Africa Centre and the British Library.

WORKS CITED

- Ajayi, J. F. Ade, and Michael Crowder, eds. *Historical Atlas of Africa*. London: Longman Group, 1985. Print.
- Altbach, Philip G. *Publishing and Development in the Third World*. Oxford: Hans Zell Publishers, 1992. Print.
- Altbach, Philip G., and Damtew Teffera, eds. *Publishing and Development. A Book of Readings*. Oxford: Bellagio Publishing Network, 1998. Print.
- Another Development and the World Crisis. Development Dialogue 1-2* (1984): 1-156. Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2015.
- Bortolot, Alexander Ives. "Ways of Recording African History." Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2015.
- Brock-Utne, Birgit, and Rodney Kofi Hopson, eds. *Languages of Instruction for African Emancipation. Focus on Postcolonial Contexts and Considerations*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2005. Print.
- Brock-Utne, Birgit, and Zubeida Desai, eds. *Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa*. Dar es Salaam: E&D Ltd, 2003. Print.
- Chakava, Henry. *Publishing in Africa: One Man's Perspective*. Oxford: Bellagio Publishing; East African Educational Publishers, 1996. Print.
- Chege, J. W. *Copyright Law and Publishing in Kenya*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1978. Print.
- "First Pan-African Conference on Curriculum, Literacy, and Book Sector Development: Rebuilding Education in Africa." African Union. African Union, n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2015.
- Gerdes, Paulus. *Women & Geometry in Southern Africa. Some Suggestions for Further Research*. Maputo: Universidade Pedagógica, 1995. Print.
- Gibbs, James, and Jack Mapanje, eds. *The African Writers' Handbook*. Oxford: African Books Collective, 1999. Print.
- Kemia, Furahia. *Enjoy Chemistry for Form 1*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2011. Print.
- Lomer, Cécile. *African Books in Print/Livres africains disponibles*. 6th ed. 2 vols. Munich: K. G. Saur, 2006. Print.
- Mcharazo, A. A. S. "Summary of S. Arunachalam's 'Accessing Information Published in the Third World: Should Spreading the Word from the Third World Always Be Like Swimming against the Current.' Paper Presented to Workshop on Access to Third World Journals." *The African Book Publishing Record* 20.4. (1994): 244-45. Print.
- Mkandawire, Thandika. "Thinking About Developmental States in Africa." *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 25.3 (2001): 289-314. Print.
- Mkandawire, Thandika, and Charles C. Soludo. *Our Continent, Our Future. African Perspectives on Structural Adjustment*. Dakar: CODESRIA; IDRC; and Africa World Press, 1999. Print.
- Mlama, Penina, and May L. B. Matheru. *Haja ya Kutumia Kiswahili Kufundisha Katika Elimu ya Juu*. [How to Use Kiswahili as a Language of Instruction at Higher Levels of Education.] Dar es Salaam: Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa, 1978. Print.
- Mlambo, Alois, ed. *African Scholarly Publishing. Essays*. Oxford: African Books Collective, 2007. Print.

"New Book Titles and Editions: 2002–2011." Bowker Data. ProQuest, n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

Olukoshi, Adebayo, and Francis Nyamnjoh. "CODESRIA: Over 50 Years of Scholarly Publishing." African Scholarly Publishing. Ed. Alois Mlambo. Oxford: African Books Collective, 2000. 57–65. Print.

"Pan-African Conference on Teacher Development. Draft Report." African Union. African Union, n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

Serious Fraud Office. "Action on Macmillan Publishers Limited." Serious Fraud Office Press Room. SFO, 22 July 2011. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

"Oxford Publishing Ltd to Pay Almost £1.9 million as Settlement after Admitting Unlawful Conduct in Its East African Operations." Serious Fraud Office Press Room. SFO, 3 July 2012. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Sector of Culture. International Flows of Selected Cultural Goods and Services, 1994–2003: Defining and Capturing the Flow of Global Cultural Trade. Quebec: UNESCO, 2005. Print.

United Nations. "United Nations Millennium Goals." United Nations. United Nations, n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

United Nations Population Fund. State of World Population 2009: Facing a Changing World: Women, Population, and Climate. New York: UNFPA, 2009. United Nations Population Fund. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

United Republic of Tanzania. "Cultural Policy." Tanzanian National Website. United Republic of Tanzania, n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

MKUKUTA (National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty): Poverty and Human Development Report 2011. Dar es Salaam: Research on Poverty Alleviation, 2011. Policy Research for Development. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

United States African Development Foundation. USADF, n.d. Web. 12 Feb. 2013.

World Bank. "World Bank Group Debars Macmillan Limited for Corruption in World Bank-Supported Education Project in Southern Sudan." World Bank News & Broadcast. World Bank, 30 Apr. 2010. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

"World Bank Sanctions Oxford University Press for Corrupt Practices Impacting Education Projects in East Africa." World Bank News & Broadcast. World Bank, 3 July 2012. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

Zelega, Paul. *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises*. Senegal: CODESRIA, 1997. Print. Zell, Hans. "Publishing in Africa: Where Are We Now?" Logos. Forum of the World Book Community 19.4 (2008): 187–95. Print.

Keep Informed With The Latest Updates

Read African Books

An introduction to Read African Books

© 2020 Read African Books. [Website Design](#) by Fuel.

More

[Search](#)
[Shop](#)
[Contact](#)

Social

